Arizona Court Upholds Corporate Tuition Tax Credits

By Sarah McIntosh

The Arizona Court of Appeals handed a victory to school choice supporters by upholding the constitutionality of the state’s corporate tuition tax credit program.

In Green v. Garriott, a three-judge panel in March decided the tax credit program, which aims to encourage business donations for tuition grants to students attending private schools, “passes constitutional muster.” The opinion holds the credit does not violate the

ARIZONA p. 9

DC Opportunity Program Faces Tough Reauthorization Battle

By Lindsey Burke

The Omnibus Appropriations Act of 2009, a $410 billion spending bill signed by President Barack Obama in March, will cancel the DC Opportunity Scholarship program unless it is reauthorized by Congress and authorized by the District of Columbia City Council. Without those approvals, children in the District of Columbia will no longer be able to receive scholarships after the 2009-10 school year.
REGISTER NOW

and Join Us in the Nation’s Capital

9th Annual

NATIONAL CHARTER SCHOOLS CONFERECE

Charter Schools: Leading Change in Public Education

Walter E. Washington Convention Center
Washington, DC

June 21-24, 2009

For Registration and Conference Information go to www.nationalcharterconference.org or call 1-800-280-6218
Utah to Continue Paying Salaries Of Teachers Union Presidents

By Thomas Cheplick

Utah state Rep. Christopher Herrod (R-Provo) got into a little trouble during the current legislative session when he proposed the Public Education Law Revision (HB 381), which would have banned school districts from paying the salaries of local teachers union presidents. The saved monies instead would have been spent on resources directly affecting student education. House Bill 381 ultimately went down to defeat February 27 in the House Education Committee on a 6-7 vote. No Democrats voted for the bill.

The Davis, Granite, and Salt Lake school districts are contracted to pay the salaries of local teachers union presidents. Herrod’s bill was designed to end that practice.

Pillaging Taxpayers

The vote mystified education reform proponents. “This is a good and sensible piece of legislation,” said Frederick Hess, director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, DC. “It seems ludicrous that, at a time when states and districts are strapped for funds and when the feds are borrowing hundreds of billions from today’s students to help maintain school budgets, that districts are subsidizing the salaries of union leaders.”

Hess believes teacher unions should pay the salaries of their local presidents out of union dues, not by making taxpayers foot the bill.

“Teacher unions are and should be free to pay their officials as they see fit—but the funds should be provided by union members and not by redirecting dollars that would otherwise fund students and classrooms.”

FREDERICK HESS
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION POLICY STUDIES
AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

Concerned About Retribution

Proponents of HB 381 hope Utah’s teacher unions won’t take their own revenge by lobbying against Herrod’s reelection because he introduced the bill.

“Rep. Herrod does a good job representing his constituents, and he is always very careful about making laws that benefit all taxpayers and citizens and the entire state,” Clark said. “I would personally hope that a labor union, as much as they could disagree with a proposed piece of legislation, would not suddenly do something purely out of retribution.”

Thomas Cheplick (thomascheplick@yahoo.com) writes from Cambridge, Massachusetts.

INTERNET INFO
DC Opportunity Program Facing Tough Battle

Continued from page 1

The program, created in 2004, currently provides scholarships worth up to $7,500 to more than 1,700 low-income children, serving families earning an average income of $22,300 per year. Since its inception the program has given scholarships to more than 3,000 students.

Language added to the omnibus bill by Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL) withholds future funding from the program unless it receives the required approvals. The program received $14 million for the 2008-09 academic year.

DoE Suppressed Information
Late in the afternoon of April 3, while media were busy covering a presidential town hall meeting, the Department of Education released the results of a study from last year showing the voucher recipients are doing at least as well in math as their public school counterparts and are reading at a half-grade level above the public school students.

Mainstream media and school choice advocates noted the department has known the results since last November but waited to release them until after Congress voted and Obama signed the law that will likely end the program. The Wall Street Journal reported Education Secretary Arne Duncan did not return calls seeking comment about the timing of the report’s release.

“Tragic Situation”

Sen. John Ensign (R-NV), who offered an unsuccessful amendment to the omnibus bill that would have neutralized the language included by Durbin, fears students currently benefiting from the scholarship program will have to return to unsafe and underperforming public schools.

“Parents are lined up to give their children a better future through the DC Opportunity Scholarship,” said Ensign. “And why not? It’s a better education in a safe environment. For policymakers, it should have been just as simple because it’s also less expensive [than forcing those children into public schools]. As a result of the Democrats’ bill, students who chose to leave a failing school and attend a better, safer school will have to return to the school they decided to leave. This is such a tragic situation.”

Virginia Walden Ford, executive director of DC Parents for School Choice, agrees. “As we talk with parents whose children receive Opportunity Scholarships, we find them concerned about what will happen to their children if the program does not continue,” Walden Ford said. “Most of our families live in areas that have some of the most troubled schools in the city. The thought of children having to go back into those schools horrifies the parents and the children.

“The Opportunity Scholarship Program has provided them with educational environments that have allowed them to have access to quality education opportunities. For them to have to start over again in schools that are not serving children well in areas of the city that are not always safe havens for kids would be devastating,” Walden Ford added.

Ripple Effects

Walden Ford believes the new requirements may kill the program. “The prospect of getting reauthorization through Congress is not an easy task, nor is getting City Council approval for the program,” Walden Ford said. “It means that the siblings of the children who currently are enrolled or other disadvantaged children would not be able to have the same chances to be educated in an environment that parents have chosen and that they have seen work,” she noted.

School choice advocates worry elimination of the scholarship program will have harmful repercussions on school choice programs nationwide. As the only federally funded school choice program in the country, the program’s continuation is considered by some to be an indicator of how Washington feels about school choice. That adds urgency to the fight to make sure the program continues.

“The language in the omnibus appropriations bill is a step backwards, but it does not spell the end for the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program. Parents, families, and civic leaders are mobilized and ready to fight to see that this program isn’t just funded for existing students but expanded and reauthorized,” said Andrew Campanella, director of communications and marketing at the Alliance for School Choice. “Across the country, we are seeing strong bipartisan support for school choice initiatives. We are hopeful that the bipartisan spirit will come to DC when it comes to the future of this program.”

A congressional proposal to reauthorize the DC Opportunity Scholarship program is expected to be considered this spring.

Lindsey Burke (lindsey.burke@heritage.org) is a research assistant in domestic policy studies at The Heritage Foundation in Washington, DC.

INTERNET INFO

Vermont Education Board Tries to Suppress Choice Poll

By Thomas Cheplick

Ninety percent of parents responding to a Vermont poll said they would choose to homeschool their children or send them to private, charter, or virtual schools over public schools.

The state board of education responded by closing its mind, asking board members not to take the results into consideration when debating school reform proposals on February 17.

The poll’s findings were released February 12 by the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice and nonprofit Vermonters for Better Education, based in Woodbury.

Panic at Board Level

Retta Dunlap, executive director of Vermonters for Better Education, was amazed by the board’s extraordinary decision.

“This all started last August when I asked Chris Robbins [a board member whose term has since expired] if the state board of education would be willing to sponsor this poll outlining what school Vermonters would like to send their children to,” Dunlap said. “I received an email from the chair of the board and also Mr. Robbins saying yes, they would sponsor this poll.”

After the poll was completed in October, Vermonters for Better Education sent the embargoed results to the state board and asked member Tom James to participate in the press conference accompanying their release.

“But they panicked when they saw nine out of 10 Vermonters would not choose public schools,” Dunlap said. “I suspect they were like, ‘Whoa, how can we sponsor a poll like this? Would it not be a slap in the face to public schools, to ‘our people in the field’ if we supported this poll?’”

The state board of education did not return phone calls seeking comment.

Discouraging Dismissal

Perhaps even more extraordinary, Dunlap said, was that Robbins, the former member, asked the board to vote on the poll during a videotaped meeting.

“He said to them, ‘We need to acknowledge [this] as a valid poll,’” said Dunlap, and he asked for them simply to acknowledge the findings, not necessarily endorse them. “That measure lost 3 to 4. The chair did not vote.”

Paul DiPerna, director of partner services for the Indianapolis-based Friedman Foundation, was equally dismayed, calling the board’s out-of-hand dismissal of the survey results “discouraging.”

“It speaks volumes,” DiPerna said.

History of Cooperation

DiPerna was particularly amazed that this happened in Vermont, which has a long history of good public interaction with private schools.

“Vermont has one of the oldest school choice programs in the country, called ‘town tuitioning,’” DiPerna explained. “When a school district does not have a middle or high school for its residents’ children, then it will pay tuition for the child to attend a private or public school in a neighboring area or district. This system has been in place for more than 100 years, but few people outside of the state know about it. It is one viable model for school choice.”

The town tuitioning program, DiPerna said, may be one reason 90 percent of the poll respondents favor school choice.

“This longstanding system has no doubt penetrated the culture of school ing in the state,” DiPerna said. “I believe parents like having options for their schooling. This is consistent from the findings from our state survey. It is a shame that public officials dismiss public opinion outright.”

Growing Backlash

Dunlap thinks public outrage over the state board of education’s shocking dismissal of the poll will only intensify.

“We are confident the people of Vermont will speak up and have their voices heard, particularly if public officials continue to find ways to try and silence them,” DiPerna said.

“In some ways, this situation brings to mind one of Newton’s laws of physics, that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction,” DiPerna said.

“DiPerna agrees. Perhaps even more extraordinary, Dunlap said, was that Robbins, the former member, asked the board to vote on the poll during a videotaped meeting.

“He said to them, ‘We need to acknowledge [this] as a valid poll,’” said Dunlap, and he asked for them simply to acknowledge the findings, not necessarily endorse them. “That measure lost 3 to 4. The chair did not vote.”

Paul DiPerna, director of partner services for the Indianapo lis-based Friedman Foundation, was equally dismayed, calling the board’s out-of-hand dismissal of the survey results “discouraging.”

“It speaks volumes,” DiPerna said.

History of Cooperation

DiPerna was particularly amazed that this happened in Vermont, which has a long history of good public interaction with private schools.

“Vermont has one of the oldest school choice programs in the country, called ‘town tuitioning,’” DiPerna explained. “When a school district does not have a middle or high school for its residents’ children, then it will pay tuition for the child to attend a private or public school in a neighboring area or district. This system has been in place for more than 100 years, but few people outside of the state know about it. It is one viable model for school choice.”

The town tuitioning program, DiPerna said, may be one reason 90 percent of the poll respondents favor school choice.

“This longstanding system has no doubt penetrated the culture of school ing in the state,” DiPerna said. “I believe parents like having options for their schooling. This is consistent from the findings from our state survey. It is a shame that public officials dismiss public opinion outright.”

Growing Backlash

Dunlap thinks public outrage over the state board of education’s shocking dismissal of the poll will only intensify.

“We are confident the people of Vermont will speak up and have their voices heard, particularly if public officials continue to find ways to try and silence them,” DiPerna said.

“In some ways, this situation brings to mind one of Newton’s laws of physics, that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction,” DiPerna said.

“The more aggressive and energetic the actions of state leaders to quash public opinion and popular sentiment, the more likely it is that activists and voters will be energized to push back or throw out their public officials.”

Thomas Cheplick (thomascheplick@yahoo.com) writes from Cambridge, Massachusetts.
Scholarship Tax Credit Bill Struggling in New Mexico

By Phillip J. Britt

Despite recent unanimous approval by the New Mexico Senate’s education committee, a bill to provide tax credits for individuals and companies donating to scholarship programs may have difficulty getting to the full legislative body for a vote.

SB 355, the Nonpublic School Scholarship Tax Credit, sponsored by state Sen. Pete Campos (D-Las Vegas), would provide tax credits of up to $500 for individuals and $1,000 for married couples filing jointly, as well as up to $50,000 for corporations that donate to qualified scholarship programs.

The scholarships, to be distributed by recognized nonprofit organizations, could be used at any qualified elementary or secondary school in the state and could cover all or part of the tuition at the qualifying school. The total amount of scholarships distributed would be determined by the scholarship-granting organization.

To be eligible for the scholarships, the bill requires students be in households with incomes low enough to qualify for a reduced-price lunch through the federal school lunch program.

Passage in Doubt

The bill passed the education committee on a 6-0 vote in early March—more easily than expected—but was subsequently referred to the legislative committee, where passage will not be as easy, according to Daniel Ulbarri, executive director of Educate New Mexico, a nonprofit organization that supported the bill.

A sunset clause would limit the tax credit in SB 355 to taxable years between January 1, 2010 and January 1, 2014. According to the New Mexico Public Education Department Web site, approximately 16,900 students in the state are currently enrolled in accredited nonpublic schools. The Web site does not indicate how many have received a scholarship from a 501(c)3 charitable organization, how many would qualify for a reduced-price lunch through the federal school lunch program, or how many attend nonpublic schools that fill available spaces using a random selection process, as a provision in the bill requires.

Expanding Choice, Saving Money

The proposal is seen as a way to expand school choice in the state, according to the Rio Grande Foundation, an Albuquerque-based research institute.

“Several other states have enacted comparable programs and have seen high levels of giving while maintaining revenue neutrality in their states, thus providing more educational choice while offsetting taxpayer cost,” said Sarah McIntosh, an adjunct scholar with the foundation.

“Tuition tax credits provide increased educational opportunities for those who could not otherwise afford it,” McIntosh added. “Instead of costing the state money, a tuition tax credit program can be revenue-neutral and may eventually save the state money by decreasing the amount of funds it has to provide directly to public schools.

“Nine states have already enacted similar programs which have benefited students, families, and taxpayers. Perhaps New Mexico should do the same,” said McIntosh.

Phil Britt (spenterprises@wowway.com) writes from Illinois.

INTERNET INFO


Special-Ed Scholarships Face Uphill Climb in Ohio

By Neal McCluskey

For the third time in two years a bill to create a publicly funded scholarship program for students with disabilities has been introduced in Ohio. The legislation faces a tough road.

The measure, introduced on February 10 by state Sen. Kevin Coughlin (R-Cuyahoga Falls), would create a Special Education Scholarship Pilot Program providing scholarships of up to $20,000 to disabled children in grades kindergarten through 12.

Recipients could use the funds to attend alternative public or private special-education programs in fiscal years 2012 to 2017. Enrollment would be capped at 3 percent of the state’s total disabled student population, about 8,000.

The program would join several existing school choice efforts in Ohio, including the statewide EdChoice voucher program for all children in failing schools, the Autism Scholarship program, and Cleveland’s citywide voucher program for low-income children. The autism program would not conflict with the special-education initiative, as autistic children would be able to enroll in either program but not both.

Long Shot

Despite the proliferation of choice in Ohio, the special-education legislation faces long odds, with the state House of Representatives having turned majority Democratic after the November elections. Even in more politically accommodating times the program ran into trouble. In 2007 it was rolled into the state budget but line-item vetoed by Gov. Ted Strickland (D). Last year the plan fell short of becoming law by one vote in the House.

“If anyone should have educational control, it’s the parents of children with special needs.”

KEVIN COUGHLIN
STATE SENATOR
CUYAHOGA FALLS, OHIO

“I think it faces an uphill battle when it goes over to the House side,” said Chad Aldis, executive director of School Choice Ohio, a choice advocacy group. But Aldis isn’t without hope.

“A lot of Democrats have been listening to parents,” Aldis said.

Coughlin, the bill’s sponsor, agrees it’s a long shot. He said he’ll likely try the 2007 strategy to maximize the proposal’s chances, rolling it into the state budget and forcing Strickland to veto it.

Long-Run Optimism

While Coughlin is tentative about the program’s chances in the short run, he is optimistic special-education choice will eventually become law.

“There is long-term hope for it,” Coughlin said, citing broad popular support. “If anyone should have educational control, it’s the parents of children with special needs.”

If the legislation is eventually enacted, Aldis doesn’t think it will happen until the fall, after the state works through its many challenging economic problems. That would give the bill several months to gather support.

Neal McCluskey (nmcluskey@cato.org) is associate director of the Cato Institute’s Center for Educational Freedom.
Maryland Considers Tax Credit Bill

By Ben DeGrow

School choice supporters in Maryland have built broad support for tax credit legislation that offers benefits to students who leave and those who remain in the public education system.

A coalition of businesses, nonprofits, and religious organizations called the BOAST Alliance (Building Opportunities for All Students and Teachers) is promoting a corporate educational tax credit program.

The bill, known in the two legislative bodies as HB 1259 and SB 715, would provide a 75 percent tax credit on corporate donations to scholarship organizations supporting private school tuition or to educational enrichment programs—such as Boys and Girls Clubs and Junior Achievement—that benefit public school students.

The proposal is closely modeled on Pennsylvania’s Educational Improvement Tax Credit, which has raised more than $350 million for state-based scholarship programs since it was enacted in 2001. The proposed program would give first scholarship priority to low-income students eligible for the federal school lunch program.

“We want this to be about building up all of our state’s students and their teachers,” said Mary Sullivan, spokeswoman for the Maryland Catholic Conference, a BOAST Alliance partner.

Improving Chances

To alleviate concerns caused by the state’s current budget shortage, the legislation authorizes no funding for the program in 2009 but leaves the door open for Maryland lawmakers to do so in future years.

At press time, committees in both houses had heard testimony for the proposal, but neither the House nor the Senate had taken action. A similar version of the bill passed the state Senate in 2008, the first success in three consecutive annual attempts.

“That in itself is a monumental achievement, given the makeup of the state legislature,” said Christopher Summers, president of the Maryland Institute for Public Policy. “We hope this time it goes a little bit further.”

Sullivan agrees the opportunity is ripe. “The bill probably has its best chances of passage in both houses this year,” she said.

Arguing Necessity

But others continue to oppose the legislation, contending it will not bring promised reform.

“The problems which voucher or school

“Fiscal deficits get people coming to the table listening to you, where before they wouldn’t give you the time of day.”

CHRISTOPHER SUMMERS, PRESIDENT
MARYLAND INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

Shifting Opinion

Summers said even though the phrase “school choice” can prove to be “toxic” at the state legislature, popular opinion in Maryland is slowly shifting toward the policy.

“We’re starting to see more individuals receptive to our ideas than we were five years ago,” Summers said. In addition, he notes, current fiscal shortages and Pennsylvania’s success with the tax credit have created new opportunities for expansion.

“If fiscal deficits get people coming to the table listening to you, where before they wouldn’t give you the time of day,” said Summers.

Ben DeGrow (ben@i2i.org) is a policy analyst for the Independence Institute, a free-market think tank in Golden, Colorado.

The Constitutional Foundation

RESTORING AMERICANISM IN AMERICA
EXPOSING AMERICA’S SOCIALISM

WHAT WENT WRONG WITH AMERICAN SCHOOLS

Up to 1972 the National Education Association was a well-established and accepted educational organization of excellent teachers with authority over their classrooms.

In 1932, John Dewey, a Fabian Socialist, was elected president of the NEA and socialist beliefs moved into the curriculum and classrooms.

In the 1950s the NEA was ‘captured’ by the Educational Socialists and turned into a teachers’ union for political power. Education began a de-emphasis of Americanism, and a dumbing down of learning commenced.

In the late 1970s, from Jimmy Carter the Educational Socialists got the Dept. of Education. American school curriculum started a shift from and an easing out of Americanism (Patriotism) to a world view of multiculturalism and globalism.

Today their arrogance has begun; “Radical ‘Social Justice’ Teaching Being Pushed on Our Schools”. (HumanEvents.com, November 10, 2008) The average school drop-out rate is 32%. Private schools are less than 5%.

“School Reform News” states the consequences of the Socialization of our schools to suit the U.N. world view.

It can be stopped by helping the Patriotic Teachers regain control of their National Education Association, the NEA.

1 IT IS ALL PART OF THE SOCIALIZATION OF AMERICA!

For the United Nations’ One-World government of Socialism.

WWW.CONSTITUTIONALFOUNDATION.US
O.W. GARVEY BLDGS., STE 628 - 200 W. DOUGLAS, WICHITA, KS 67202
316-263-0542 OR 316-685-3518
Arizona Supreme Court Delivers Stunning Blow To School Choice

By Ben DeGrow

With Arizona’s highest court putting an end to the state’s two targeted voucher programs, supporters are seeking solutions to serve the needs of students destined to be displaced this fall.

On March 25, the Arizona Supreme Court ruled 5-0 the state must end the Scholarship for Pupils with Disabilities and the Disabled Pupils Choice Grant—its voucher programs for special-needs and foster-child students, respectively. Justices ruling in the Cain v. Horne matter determined the programs violated two constitutional Blaine Amendments prohibiting the appropriation of public dollars to private religious organizations.

The two scholarship programs, both enacted in 2006, are serving 225 special-needs children and 248 foster care children in 2008-09. The court allowed students to stay enrolled in their current private schools with scholarship funding through the end of the school year.

“I think this ruling is going to have an unfortunate impact on participating children’s lives,” said Dan Lips, senior policy analyst for The Heritage Foundation in Washington, DC. “These scholarships were providing a lifeline for these children, who are among the most at-risk in our traditional public school system.”

Competing Standards

Keller believes the ruling is unclear about the current policy that allows public schools, instead of parents, to place special-needs students in private schools to receive services. He said half the students at Chrysalis are placed there directly through this process.

“If allowing parents to use public funds to buy a private school education is unconstitutional, so is allowing public school districts to do the same thing,” Keller said.

Panfilo Contreras, executive director of the Arizona School Boards Association, one of the entities that sued to end the programs, said school districts are bound by a careful process of review before placing a child in a private school, and districts are held accountable for oversight of those students.

“Public bodies are entrusted with allocating public monies and are held accountable for the appropriate and effective use of those funds,” Contreras said.

Clear Alternative

Andrew Coulson, director of the Cato Institute’s Center for Educational Freedom, said the Arizona ruling provides the remedy to preserve opportunity for the affected students.

“The court laid down a clear path for continuing to offer real school choice to these families: educational tax credits,” said Coulson.

The Arizona Supreme Court affirmed in Cain “that tax credits for contributions to school tuition organizations were not appropriations of public money” and therefore don’t violate the state’s Blaine Amendments. (See story on facing page.)

“All the court is asking legislators to do is connect the dots—expand Arizona’s existing education tax credit scholarship programs to serve special-needs students,” Coulson said.

Seeking Solutions

Contreras says the school boards association opposes tax credits as well, claiming “they improperly divert public funds.”

Keller believes Arizona’s existing corporate tax credit program could be the best vehicle to serve the nearly 500 students who will lose their scholarship aid at the end of the current school year. Changes likely would have to be made to the caps on scholarship amounts and the means-testing provisions in the programs.

“I think we’re really looking at the need for a legislative solution,” Keller said. “It has to be done this year to save the kids who are relying on the scholarships today.”

Moving Forward

Lips said the Cain ruling shows the urgency of removing Blaine Amendments.

“I think this decision highlights the need for education reformers and policymakers to consider ways to amend state constitutions to remove these outdated legal restrictions,” Lips said.

“I think this ruling is going to have an unfortunate impact on participating children’s lives. These scholarships were providing a lifeline for these children …”

DAN LIPS

SENIOR POLICY ANALYST

THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION

Keller said that remains a possibility in Arizona, where it could be accomplished by popular vote either through a legislatively initiated referendum or a citizens’ petition drive. “Right now, every conceivable legal option is still on the table,” he said.

“This is not the end of the line for school choice in Arizona,” Keller said. “We’ll continue to push for innovative school choice programs, and we expect Arizona’s current school choice programs to continue and flourish.”

Ben DeGrow (ben@i2i.org) is a policy analyst for the Independence Institute in Golden, Colorado.

INTERNET INFO


Andrea Weck and School Choice (video): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v= gGMfGnvrD4&feature=channel_page
Arizona state’s constitutional provisions regarding religion and education and accords with federal constitutional provisions.

The majority opinion, signed by Judges John Gemmill and Patricia Norris, says the credit benefits a valid nonreligious educational purpose and does not directly aid religion. While agreeing with most of the majority opinion, the third judge, Donn Kessler, dissented in part, saying he was not sure the credit doesn’t violate the U.S. constitutional ban against advancing religion.

“This ruling offers immediate relief to the nearly 2,000 Arizona school children who rely on corporately funded scholarships to escape from their failing public schools ...”

TIM KELLER, ATTORNEY INSTITUTE FOR JUSTICE

Arizona schools accept students using them. Critics of the tax credit argue it takes money from the public school system and violates constitutional provisions barring the public from funding religious schools. Constitutionally, Arizona must provide a “general and uniform” public school system, and program opponents say that means no state money can go even indirectly to religious alternatives to traditional public schools. Keller disagrees.

“To date, every tax credit scholarship program challenged in court by education reform opponents has been upheld as consistent with both the federal and state constitutions,” Keller pointed out.

Helping Low-Income Children
Critics also have argued the program only helps rich kids go to private schools. But enrollment data show otherwise, as the average annual family income of tax credit recipients in 2006-07 was $28,458. In 2007-08 the average was $35,533, according to surveys by the Arizona School Tuition Organization Association, citing the same Arizona Supreme Court decision upholding individual tax credits.

The effects of the Court of Appeals decision are far-reaching. Under the Corporate School Tuition Organization Tax Credit, more than 16 school tuition organizations in the state distribute scholarships, and approximately 150 organizations in the state distribute Tax Credit, more than 16 school tuition scholarships. A bill to remove a scheduled 2011 expiration date for Arizona’s corporate tax credit scholarship program is awaiting Arizona Senate action.

A bill to remove a scheduled 2011 expiration date for Arizona’s corporate tax credit scholarship program is awaiting Arizona Senate action.
Virtual Ventures Expand Choice for K-12 Students

By Evelyn B. Stacey

Not long ago, online courses were programs only for universities and vocational schools.

But today, online offerings at public elementary, middle, and high schools are gaining ground, bringing more choices to parents, students, and teachers in the world of K-12 education.

Connections Academy, launched in 2002, has led the charge as the first national virtual public school. It’s available in 15 states, offering courses from kindergarten through 12th grade. The program is accredited by the Commission on International and Trans-regional Accreditation and hires certified teachers and community coordinators. The coordinators arrange field trips to museums, state capitols, historical sites, and other educational destinations.

Connections Academy’s goal is to provide the parental involvement and flexibility of homeschooling along with the strong standards and accountability of professional schooling. The program started in 2002 in two states and now operates under management contracts from charter schools or school districts in Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, and Wisconsin.

Satisfied Customers

Though critics express doubts about the quality of virtual schooling, the practice continues to show positive benefits. Virtual schools operate without many of the limitations of their physical counterparts and produce personalized programs to work with individual students and their learning styles. Nearly 15 percent of students attending Connections Academy are special-needs children.

The academy is able to work one-on-one with students, ensuring accountability by assigning a learning coach who works with the student and teacher to plan their schedule. Teachers and learning coaches discuss students’ strengths, skill deficiencies, and previous academic performance. Students take a survey to identify learning styles to help inform the teacher and focus best practices to aid in individual progress.

The students’ achievement scores indicate the benefit of these methods. At Central California Connections Academy, 100 percent of 10th graders were proficient in language arts on the California State Test in 2008-09, while the Capistrano Connections Academy had 100 percent of 5th graders score proficient.

Parents overwhelmingly support the program. In 2009 each school conducted a parent survey, and almost all parents said they would recommend the school to other families. Also, 95 percent of students were satisfied with the program, and in California 100 percent of parents were satisfied with the curriculum.

DID YOU KNOW . . .

... that by preventing 650 to 900 students from dropping out, Illinois’ 19 charter schools have saved taxpayers $200 million? A study by the Center for Labor Market Studies points out that in Illinois a high school dropout costs taxpayers $221,000 in unemployment, housing subsidies, food stamps, and incarceration. Another study, recently released by the RAND Corporation and focusing exclusively on data from Illinois, shows a student’s chance of graduating high school is increased by 7 to 10 percent when he or she attends high school at a charter school.

Illinois has a law capping the number of charter schools that can operate statewide, and limits them to 30 in Chicago, where they’re most popular. Eliminating the cap would cost taxpayers nothing, and as the research shows, would actually save them millions.

Hooiser State Setback

Despite the impressive student test results and parent satisfaction, the program is running into a roadblock in the Midwest. In 2007 the Indiana General Assembly passed a law ending state funding for virtual charter schools after a two-year trial period, which recently expired. The Indiana Connections Academy has had to suspend enrollment plans for the 2009-10 school year while the board of directors raises funds for a private pilot program to continue educating its students.

The Indiana law was passed after two years of debate, with supporters arguing virtual schools are not as effective as traditional schools, and critics saying virtual schools are more cost-effective than traditional schools.

That funding concern may be misplaced, however, as a study by the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy at the Indiana University School of Education shows the schools save tax money. In a 2008 study to establish policies for virtual schools in Indiana, the center found virtual schools’ average per-pupil expenditures are approximately $8,300—almost $1,500 less than Indiana’s traditional public schools spend on each student annually.

‘Win-Win Situation’

Terry Spradlin, coauthor of the report and the center’s associate director for education policy, said, “Virtual education can be a ‘win-win situation’ in providing additional classes, such as Advanced Placement courses, to traditional students, [and] by serving students on the fringes whose needs aren’t met in bricks-and-mortar schools. That includes some gifted students, who sometimes complain they are bored by school.”

Other obstacles remain on the policy front, Spradlin said, such as rules regarding teacher training and certification, student accountability, and state and local funding.

“There really is an unfettered regulatory environment that governs virtual education,” said Spradlin.

As of late 2008, more than 93,000 students nationwide are being educated through virtual charter schools. Alabama, Florida, and Michigan have passed laws further expanding the availability of virtual charters in the past year.

Evelyn B. Stacey (estacey@pacificresearch.org) is a research fellow in domestic policy at the Pacific Research Institute in Sacramento.

By Virginia Gentles

New Hampshire charter school advocates are confident about the prospects of two charter-related legislative initiatives, one streamlining the charter application process and the other providing facilities funding for charter schools.

House Bill 688 would abbreviate the approval process for locally authorized public charter schools. Supporters believe the legislation will cut the process from more than two years to about a year.

Charter schools could receive 30 percent of the reimbursement for annual lease payments under House Bill 140. Charters currently do not receive funding through the state’s facilities aid program.

Both bills have passed the House Education Committee. At press time HB 140 was pending in the House Finance Committee, as the state explores the possibility of using federal stimulus funds for charter school facilities. HB 688 passed the House in a late March floor vote. At press time, no action had been taken on it by the Senate.

The situation became a bit complicated on March 31, when the House Finance Committee passed an amendment that would cap charter school enrollment statewide and extend a moratorium on state-authorized charter schools, set to expire in June, by providing no funding for them.

Increasing Acceptance
Charter proponents view the new proposals as evidence the schools are increasingly recognized as viable public school options. Eileen Liponis, executive director of the New Hampshire Chartered Public School Association, said, “The tide has turned.”

People in the state are more familiar with charter schools now,” Liponis explained.

Matt Southerton, director of the New Hampshire Center for Innovative Schools, agrees.

“Over the last several years, New Hampshire has come to know charter schools. ... People know what charters are and they offer”

Matt Southerton, Director
New Hampshire Center for Innovative Schools

Overcoming Ideology
State Rep. Kimberly Casey (D-Rockingham) has led the legislative charge for charters, initiating both bills in the state House this year and advocating for charter funding in the last legislative session.

“Charter schools have changed considerably,” Casey said. “Charter schools had to overcome ideological challenges from the inception of the law until now. Attitudes toward charters have changed considerably,” Casey said. “We support opportunities for school districts to be creative in the way they serve their students. We want to create as many opportunities as possible to provide individualized instruction for students.”

Legal Impediments

New Hampshire currently has 11 charter schools. Although its charter law passed in 1995, the first charter schools did not open until legislative changes introduced a state authorization process in 2003.

The original charter law allowed only what advocates describe as a prohibitively lengthy district authorization process. All existing charter schools have been authorized by the State Board of Education.

HB 688 will streamline the local authorizing process by removing an initial town vote requirement. Casey believes the legislative changes will create a more user-friendly process.

Resistance Remains

Todd Ziebarth, vice president for policy at the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, says New Hampshire’s legislature will probably approve the bill streamlining district authorization, but he is uncertain of its ultimate impact.

“There is still a lot of skepticism and resistance to charters at the district level,” Ziebarth said. “If the state retains both the state and district authorization options, there are good prospects for future growth, but it will be hard slogging.”

The state Department of Education no longer receives a federal grant providing start-up funds for new charter schools. The original grant expired in 2007, and the state has an application for a new grant pending.

Bad Reputation

New Hampshire has a relatively poor reputation for charter school progress.

The Center for Education Reform’s 2008 charter law rankings gave New Hampshire a “C” and declared it the 13th weakest of the nation’s 41 charter laws. Ziebarth said the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools considers New Hampshire’s funding among the worst nationwide, with no facilities funding and low operating money compared to district schools.

Ziebarth believes additional changes to state law are needed beyond the facilities funding and application process proposals. Also, he says, the state’s overall education environment needs to evolve further for new schools to open.

“There is still uncertainty around future charter funding and the state’s and districts’ openness to new charters,” Ziebarth said.

IN OTHER WORDS

“Over the past five years, the [DC Opportunity] scholarship program has provided hope to thousands of families. ... Children who started two or three grade-levels behind are now catching up and planning for college. The program is so popular that the Washington Scholarship Fund, which administers the program, has received about four applications for each available scholarship.

“Despite this success, many lawmakers in Congress are now talking about ending the program. Parents can’t understand why. Most don’t follow politics. But they see their children making progress, and they want them to stay in their good schools. And they think those students’ little brothers and sisters—and their neighbors’ children—deserve the same opportunities.”

— Virginia Walden Ford, founder of DC Parents for School Choice, National Review Online, March 27, 2009

INTERNET INFO


Lessons from California’s Charter Schools of the Year

By Evelyn B. Stacey

The Oakland Charter Academy in northern California and the Our Community Charter School in the San Fernando Valley have won the Hart Vision “Charter School of the Year” award from the California Charter Schools Association.

“These exemplary charter schools should be studied and their best practices replicated in the broader public school system,” said Jed Wallace, president and CEO of the association.

The association’s Hart Vision Award is given each year in honor of former state Sen. Gary Hart (D-Santa Barbara) for his 1993 charter school legislation. Since then the state has added nearly 100 charter schools annually.

Academic Success

The Academic Performance Indicator (API), a measurement of a school’s success administered by the California Department of Education, for the Oakland Charter Academy this year was 902, easily surpassing the statewide goal of 800 out of 1,000. Within five years the charter rose from an API of 736 to 902.

“The API is a good indicator after you pass 800 because the students have to work very hard to maintain it,” said Jorge Lopez, executive director of Oakland Charter Academy and a recent appointee to the California Board of Education.

The Our Community Charter School in Los Angeles County achieved a 119 point jump on the API in just two years. For the 2007-08 school year the school earned an API score of 833.

“Both of these schools prove that through hard work and determination, public schools can successfully close the achievement gap,” said Wallace.

Motivation, Not Money

The schools succeeded despite receiving thousands of dollars less per student than the California public school funding average. The Oakland Charter Academy, for example, earned the 902 API score while receiving $7,211 per student—nearly $4,366 below the state average of $11,547.

“As a charter school, we have complete local control here in how we use our budget,” said Chris Ferris, principal of Our Community. “Having complete control, we are able to make innovative decisions. I think charter schools are where the most innovative and passionate teaching is in California.”

Elsewhere in California, the Berkeley Unified school district receives nearly $17,000 per student, yet only 56 percent of its students pass reading. Oakland Unified receives close to $12,000 per student with an API score of 674, and just 24 percent of its fourth graders are proficient in reading.

Evelyn B. Stacey (estacey@pacificresearch.org) is a policy fellow in education studies at the Pacific Research Institute in Sacramento, California.
Economist: Choice Is Best Path to Education Reform

By Jim Waters

A leading University of Kentucky economist says empowering parents through school choice will prove more effective in reforming public education than the state’s top-down, one-size-fits-all policies.

In researching his new report, “Fears versus Facts about School Choice,” John Garen, Ph.D., chairman of the Department of Economics for Kentucky’s flagship university, said he was most surprised to discover the high degree of centralized management by the state’s Department of Education.

“Whether you have programs to teach kids how to vote, dropout-prevention grants, family resource centers, increasing the school year by a certain number of days—these are probably good ideas ... in some schools, but not good ideas in others,” said Garen in an hour-long interview March 6 on WLLV-AM, a Louisville radio station serving a largely black audience.

Overreaching, Overspending

In his report, published by the Bluegrass Institute for Public Policy Solutions, Garen pointed out several bills introduced during the 2008 session of the Kentucky General Assembly represented education overreach and overspending, including mandates for additional physical activity during the school day and career-guidance spending.

Garen said the resources used to force such policies on all school districts are wasted when those programs fail to achieve the desired effect.

“This is one way we end up spending more and more but not getting much out of it,” Garen said.

By contrast, Garen’s report states the competition fostered by school choice would provide incentives to “use resources effectively.”

Big Spending, Dismal Results

Along with continual spending increases—inflation-adjusted per-pupil spending nearly doubled nationally between 1970 and 2005, from $5,000 to $9,000—other indicators often considered as progress also rose substantially in the past four-plus decades. Garen reports pupil-teacher ratios fell dramatically—from 25.8 in 1960 to 16 in 2001—while the percentage of teachers with at least a master’s degree rose even more dramatically, from 23.5 percent in 1960 to 56.8 percent in 2001.

Despite these investments, the report found National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results indicate “essentially no progress in reading competence among public-school students,” while mathematics scores improved some for 9- and 13-year-olds but not for 17-year-old high school students.

National trends reflect what’s happened in Kentucky since its much-balloonered education reform law (KERA) in 1990. Between 1989-90, the final pre-KERA school year, and 1995-96, Kentucky’s per-pupil spending grew by 30 percent, its student-teacher ratio fell by 4.5 percent, and teacher payrolls rose by 3.86 percent.

Such spending increases did not improve student achievement. Fourth-grade NAEP math test scores showed a lower increase than for the nation as a whole, while eighth-grade math scores showed only a slightly higher increase than the national average. Kentucky’s ACT scores had smaller increases than the national average.

Garen says the education establishment’s claims that KERA has produced “great progress do not mesh with the facts,” including the state’s recent poor performance in reading and writing proficiency and only small improvements in math.

Charter School Growth Explosive

Garen’s report also addresses false claims about charter schools by opponents of school choice.

According to U.S. Department of Education figures, Garen notes, the number of charter schools nationwide went from virtually none in the early 1990s to more than 4,100 today, with 347 of those schools being newly created in 2007. While there are 1.2 million students enrolled in charter schools in 40 states and the District of Columbia, which had a nation-high 20 percent of its students in charters during the 2004-05 school year, Kentucky has no charter school law at all, he noted.

Garen stresses any charter school policy must encourage development of lots of new charters instead of simply turning failing schools into charters. He says that will help counter claims a charter school law won’t work in Kentucky because of a lack of capacity in good schools.

“Otherwise, we’re back to this problem that people are very fearful of—and maybe justifiably so—that all the kids will try to get into the good schools and the rest of them are left in bad schools,” Garen said in the radio interview.

“Choice induces suppliers, firms ... the entities supplying the educational services, to seek to provide what the people want. And if you have a choice, you can move away from the things you don’t want to find the things that you do.”

“The state wants to discover the high degree of centralized management by the state’s Department of Education.

“Charter School growth is explosive,” Garen said.

“Choice induces suppliers, firms ... the entities supplying the educational services, to seek to provide what the people want. And if you have a choice, you can move away from the things you don’t want to find the things that you do.”

Economic Insights

Some education researchers welcome the increased interest of economists such as Garen in education reform.

“Others, otherwise, we’re back to this problem that people are very fearful of—and maybe justifiably so—that all the kids will try to get into the good schools and the rest of them are left in bad schools,” Garen said in the radio interview.

“Choice induces suppliers, firms ... the entities supplying the educational services, to seek to provide what the people want. And if you have a choice, you can move away from the things you don’t want to find the things that you do.”

Economic Insights

Some education researchers welcome the increased interest of economists such as Garen in education reform.

“Others, otherwise, we’re back to this problem that people are very fearful of—and maybe justifiably so—that all the kids will try to get into the good schools and the rest of them are left in bad schools,” Garen said in the radio interview.

“Choice induces suppliers, firms ... the entities supplying the educational services, to seek to provide what the people want. And if you have a choice, you can move away from the things you don’t want to find the things that you do.”
Report Affirms Alternative Credentialing for Teachers

By Evelyn B. Stacey

A new study released by the U.S. government reveals teachers credentialed through alternative programs do just as good a job in the classroom as those credentialed through teaching colleges.

The Institute for Educational Science (IES) study, “An Evaluation of Teachers Trained through Different Routes to Certification,” released in February, provides detailed information for policymakers nationwide in discussing the best ways to prepare teachers.

Opposed to Innovation
Despite a growing shortage of qualified teachers nationwide, universities and teacher unions still support maintaining traditional teaching credentials and adamantly oppose alternative routes.

Others, including principals, administrators, and teachers, view alternative credentialing as a benefit.

David Saba, president of the federally funded American Board of Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE), a nonprofit organization in Washington, DC started in 2001 to create flexible, cost-effective programs for career-changers aspiring to be teachers, says 95 percent of principals his organization has surveyed prefer ABCTE teachers over candidates from standard routes.

“Teachers learn to teach by practicing the craft, not by taking coursework in its history or psychology.”

KATE WALSH, PRESIDENT
NATIONAL CENTER FOR TEACHER QUALITY

The IES authors found the main difference between traditional and alternative credentials is the amount of coursework required before classroom observations and teaching begin. They looked at only the less-selective alternative routes because traditional preparation courses are not highly selective.

With that limitation, the authors concluded the type of teacher preparation has no significant effect on student achievement.

Results from highly selective alternative routes suggest otherwise, however. Nonprofit training organizations such as ABCTE, the New Teacher Project, Teach for America, and Teach First in England all require multiple interviews and six weeks of training before moving into the classroom. The programs’ administrators assess candidates’ knowledge of subject area first, then prepare them in pedagogy.

According to ABCTE, successful, selective alternative routes to teaching expand the number of minority teachers and experienced professionals at no extra financial burden to the state.

Evelyn B. Stacey (estacey@pacificresearch.org) is a policy fellow at the Pacific Research Institute, a think tank in Sacramento.

INTERNET INFO


There’s more to directions than EAST and WEST.
THERE’S MORE TO POLITICS THAN LEFT AND RIGHT.

A compass doesn’t just point in two directions — and an accurate map of politics shouldn’t either. The fact is, millions of people say the labels left and right — or “liberal” and “conservative” — do not properly describe their politics.

No wonder. A simple line from “left” to “right” just isn’t detailed enough to include every possible twist and turn of political belief.

That’s where the World’s Smallest Political Quiz comes in. It’s a better “map” of politics. Answer to questions about personal and economic issues, and the Quiz pinpoints your political identity on an innovative “Diamond Chart” that includes conservative and liberal — and libertarian, statist, and centrist.

The World’s Smallest Political Quiz has been praised by the Washington Post, and more than 9.4 million people have taken it online. What’s your real political identity? Take the Quiz. For each statement below, circle A for agree, M for maybe/not sure, and D for disagree. Then find your position on the chart.

How do you stand on PERSONAL issues?

How do you stand on ECONOMIC issues?

Find Your Place on the Chart

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE QUIZ, VISIT: www.TheAdvocates.org
Obama’s Education Reform Plan Lacks Focus

By Thomas Cheplick

President Barack Obama’s education plan is “lacking in focus” and like a “puzzle,” according to one of America’s top distance learning and online education experts.

Alfred Rovai, a professor of education at Regent University in Virginia, also found Obama’s March 10 speech to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, in which he detailed his education plan, “elitist.”

“If you look at President Obama’s background—Harvard University, Columbia, teaching law at the University of Chicago—he comes from an elite background, so it is no surprise that his speech would not discuss much distance learning or online education opportunities,” Rovai said.

“Law schools are notorious for not being interested in distance education,” Rovai noted. “The president probably has not been exposed to distance education much. It is because of his elitist background.”

Melissa Lazarin, associate director of education policy at the Center for American Progress, disagrees.

“I believe Obama’s education platform during the campaign indicated strong support for distance learning and online education, and I do think that both President Obama and [Education] Secretary [Arne] Duncan’s strong inclination towards innovation provide an opportunity to expand the capacity of distance learning programs,” Lazarin said.

Scattershot Approach

Though Obama’s proposed education reforms include several components free-market advocates like—such as merit pay for teachers and increased support for charter schools—Rovai said his plan lacks a coherent theme, unlike past administrations’ proposals.

“When I reflect back on the Clinton administration, the theme and focus was on Internet connectivity—specifically K-12—and then when you look at the Bush administration they also had a focus. They changed the focus from Internet connectivity to focusing on low achievers in the school system,” he noted. “I am not sure what the Obama administration has in terms of focus.

“The president mentioned teacher merit pay, which was quite surprising considering his political base, and also investment in early childhood education. That’s a big thing, too—you hear a lot about it from the school choice movement. He [also] talked about expanding charter reform, but these components are just that—initiatives. It’s a shotgun approach,” Rovai said.

Disparate Initiatives

Rovai said it’s very hard to see coherency in Obama’s plan.

“Another thing about the president’s plan is his desire to grant universal access to higher education. He thinks that everyone should have at least one year of post-secondary education under their belt, but that is just another initiative. How does that fit? What part of the puzzle is that? This is all a puzzle,” Rovai said.

Lazarin believes the Obama administration did forward a coherent plan.

“President Obama’s speech outlined a bold education plan, and his early efforts have put education front and center, which is remarkable given these trying times. The president has appropriately linked the robustness of our education system with our nation’s economic future. And he’s calling for dramatic reforms in education—not simply incremental steps that will lead to modest improvements. His remarks on teacher effectiveness, reconfiguring the school calendar, charter schools, and rigorous standards and assessments override partisan ideology,” Lazarin said.

Rovai remains unconverted.

“The president’s education plan is not incremental or sequential, it is an independent series of initiatives that do not seem to be linked together at all. I want to see how they are linked together. He has brought up initiatives that experts over the years have analyzed, and now he says we are going to address all of them, and hopefully if we address all these things we will have a better system.”

“I would like to see a greater unifying focus, and know exactly how teacher merit pay is related to investment in early education, and how that is related to charter schools, and so forth. How do all these things fit together?” Rovai wondered.

INTERNET INFO

President Barack Obama’s March 10 speech on education at the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce: http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-of-the-President-to-the-Hispanic-Chamber-of-Commerce/

School Choice Group in Colo. Launches Blog

By Jillian Melchior

A new Independence Institute blog—The Good, The Bad, and The Shameful—was launched in February and is covering the Colorado public education system and school reform efforts.

The Independence Institute, a free-market think tank based in Golden, Colorado, developed the blog as part of an effort to hold schools accountable.

Pam Benigno, director of the group’s Education Policy Center, said she came up with the idea in November after seeing a resolution submitted by the Colorado Association of School Boards that she perceived to be explicitly against charter schools.

“I decided at that time we needed a Web site so the public can see what their elected officials are supporting,” Benigno said.

Benigno writes the blog, drawing from the research she does in following education reform in Colorado for the Independence Institute. The institute promotes the site by podcasting, e-mailing policymakers, and asking other blogs to link to it.

“Someone needs to say ‘shame on you’ when it’s appropriate, and someone needs to say, ‘that was a good action’ other times,” Benigno said. “Newspapers report just the facts. That’s what they’re supposed to do. But I wanted a site where I could say that was good, that was bad, or that was shameful.”

Jillian Melchior (jilliankaym@gmail.com) writes from Michigan.

NET INFO

Harlem Parents Rally for More Charter Schools

By Jillian Melchior

More than 5,000 people gathered in Harlem in New York City in mid-March hoping to ensure charter schools continue thriving in their neighborhood.

Harlem Parents United, a parents’ group associated with a local charter school, the Harlem Success Academy, hosted the March 18 event after news accounts revealed charter schools may be put under the authority of a body that is hostile to them.

If state legislators do not renew mayoral control of the New York City education system this spring, a group of elected parents known as a Community Education Council may get control of Harlem’s charter schools by this summer.

“I think when you see thousands of families show up to support education reform, it demonstrates the level of enthusiasm and the level of concern that parents across the country have for the quality of schools their kids go to,” said Andrew Campanella, spokesman for the Alliance for School Choice, a national advocacy group based in Washington, DC.

“The high attendance [at the rally] basically proves what school choice advocates have been saying all along—that parents are engaged, and they want immediate action, not just talking points from public officials and education bureaucrats,” Campanella said.

Hostile Takeover

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s control over the city’s education system is set to expire on June 30. The District 5 (Harlem) Community Education Council has a reputation for being anti-reform, said sources who asked not to be named because of the volatility of the subject.

The council is considering a resolution that would call for a moratorium on new charter schools in Harlem. If mayoral control expires, it would have the authority to implement that moratorium.

“The purpose of the event was to rally parents to make sure there was no moratorium or cap on charter schools,” Campanella said.

Many parents of children in charter schools are concerned the community council, which claims to represent them, will not, said Joe Williams, executive director of Democrats for Education Reform, a national group based in New York City. Though parents of charter school students are not prevented from running for the council, the public school Parent Teacher Association votes for members—which charter school advocates say makes it nearly impossible for one of their own to get on the council.

“The Community Education Council seems more interested in protecting failure than in allowing all parents in the community to have a voice when it comes to their children’s education,” noted parent Natasha Shanor in a news release issued by Harlem Parents United in March.

Joe Williams
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
DEMOCRATS FOR EDUCATION REFORM

Charter schools are the only things good in public education in Harlem right now.”

Fast Growth of Charters

Williams said many of the parents he has spoken to about the issue are “not happy at all.” He estimated there is a better than 50 percent chance mayoral control will expire and the council will gain authority. If that happens, he said, it will slow the growth of the most popular schools in the district.

“As the number of choices [has] expanded to meet the demand from parents, it’s been encouraging, and it’s gotten people used to the idea of choice,” Williams said of local charter schools.

“But this would put the marketplace off its track. Charter schools are the only things good in public education in Harlem right now.”

In 1998 New York legislators passed a law allowing charter schools to open. Harlem has more per square mile than any other community in the country, with 22 open now and two more scheduled to open this year.

Strong Demand

The demand is still high. Last year, 5,000 parents attended the Harlem Success Academy lottery, vying for 600 available spots.

“Public charter school waiting lists are still incredibly long,” noted Jenny Sedlis, director of external affairs for the Success Charter Network, a charter management organization whose flagship is the Harlem Success Academy. “A moratorium on new public charter schools in District 5 would limit opportunities for parents who have made it very clear they want more choices.”

Williams said instead of relying on a council to represent parents’ voices, New York legislators should allow parents to speak for themselves by allowing them to choose.

“Parent choice is the ultimate parent voice, and having so-called elected parents representing all parents is not as effective in enacting real accountability as giving parents real choice regarding where their children are educated,” Williams said.

IN OTHER WORDS

“On December 8, we pointed out this kind of ruling would raise a new host of questions about other programs where public funds flow to private schools, such as when local school districts contract for individual instruction of severely disabled students and when higher educational scholarships are used to attend private colleges. ...

“That should create even more urgency for a substantive debate about the future of Arizona education, starting with a proposed constitutional amendment to reverse this ruling. School choice advocates should get that debate under way quickly so this movement can get on the right track again.”

— East Valley (Arizona) Tribune editorial on the state supreme court ruling voucher programs unconstitutional, March 25, 2009

New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg addresses the Harlem Charter Night Rally & Celebration March 18. Harlem has more charter schools per square mile than any other community in the country, with 22 open now and two more scheduled to open this year.

“I think when you see thousands of families show up to support education reform, it demonstrates the level of enthusiasm and the level of concern that parents across the country have for the quality of schools their kids go to.”

Andrew Campanella
ALLIANCE FOR SCHOOL CHOICE

Jillian Melchior (jilliankaym@gmail.com) writes from Michigan.
The Roger Bacon Academy (these are members of its Vikings football team) is one of the largest charter schools in North Carolina, with two campuses and more than 1,000 students.

“[Teachers whose students didn’t learn] were adopting fads willy-nilly, whatever the latest idea was, and they were invariably not successful.”

BAKER MITCHELL, FOUNDER
ROGER BACON ACADEMY

“Teacher Enthusiasm
That’s why RBA looks for teachers in lateral-entry programs or straight out of college, “before they form bad habits,” then puts them through extensive training before they start teaching. At one time, RBA’s faculty averaged less than three years’ worth of classroom experience.

Megan Britt, for example, was hired a month after graduating from nearby UNC-Wilmington in 2005. The kindergarten teacher found the intensive phonics program at RBA more effective than the “whole language” theory she was taught in college.

“When I was student teaching,” Britt said, “[the students] learned a lot of sight words, but no methodology like we have here. This is much more organized to me than what I saw in student teaching.”

Less Funding, Better Results
The Direct Instruction program is a tightly organized methodology with frequent training, classroom observation, and feedback that some teachers find daunting.

“A lot of people have a problem with the high expectations for the teachers,” Britt said. “You have to do what you’re supposed to, and if you don’t, you get called on it—which is good.”

Mitchell says the program adapts well to different content, whether the classical trivium or “something nouveau … as long as it’s nested in a behaviorally sound approach to instructional design.”

Britt says she finds it “very teacher friendly.”

Robert Wingett, a retired Marine who teaches second grade, said the scripted program actually demands creative teaching rather than squelching it.

“There is a misconception about Direct Instruction, that it is robotic,” Wingett said. “I can assure you it is not.” There are specific skills that are taught in a particular sequence, he said, but “you can add to the script all you want. You can develop your own style. The bottom line is to make the kids successful.”

Proven Techniques
Nila Wojton, who teaches fifth grade, is a 32-year veteran who came to RBA from a Catholic school in Connecticut.

She said the accommodation for special-needs students is “no different than what I was used to” in other school systems, and the technique, while demanding of the teacher, is “effective—absolutely.”

“You are responsible for bringing them to mastery,” Wojton said. RBA’s philosophy is that every child can learn if properly taught, Mitchell says. And according to state records, it’s working. Compared to nearby elementary and middle schools, the Brunswick County campus had 17 percent more students reading at or above grade level last year, and 22 percent more in math. More than 20 percent more RBA students were succeeding in both subjects compared to other local schools, and a large number of RBA students are heading into Early College programs.

All this occurred while receiving 30 percent less funding than surrounding schools, said Mitchell.

“No Child Left Behind is exactly right,” Mitchell said. “We should have every child learning.”

Hal Young (hal.young@smithyoung.com) writes from North Carolina. An earlier version of this article appeared in the February 2009 issue of the John Locke Foundation’s Carolina Journal. Reprinted with permission.
Why We Should Pay High School Students to Graduate

By Hon. Pat Garofalo

One of the best parts about being a legislator in Minnesota—and probably in any other state, for that matter—is having the opportunity to meet with some of the thousands of elementary and high school students who visit the Capitol every year.

Though more often than not the kids are only stopping by because they are from my district and their teacher has required them to visit their legislator, every once in a while I get students who find me on their own and surprise me with their knowledge of the political process and some of the issues that are important to them.

While talking to students who are engaged in their education and their government will certainly brighten a day that’s too stuffed with lobbyists looking for a piece of our ever-shrinking budgetary pie, I have long wanted to find something—an issue, a bill, a current event, anything—I could use to reduce the chance of turning a trip to the Capitol into a scene reminiscent of Ben Stein’s class in Ferris Bueller’s Day Off.

So the first time I asked a group of high school students if any of them would be interested in graduating early, I knew I was onto something. When I asked those same students if the prospect of several thousand dollars in scholarship money would motivate them to finish high school early, kids who used to wait patiently for their teacher to move them along suddenly started paying attention and asking questions—a lot of them, namely, “Where can I sign up, and how does it work?”

My answer: the Early Graduation Achievement Act (EGAA). It’s as simple as it sounds—graduate early, get cash.

Real Rewards

How much cash depends on each student’s particular level of motivation.

For the purposes of my bill, I set up a graduated scale that would award $7,500 to a student completing all his required coursework midway through his junior year; $5,000 to a student finishing at the end of his junior year; and $2,500 to a student finishing midway through his senior year. The money could be used at any accredited post-secondary institution in Minnesota, and participation in the program wouldn’t preclude students from taking part in some of the time-honored traditions of high school, such as homecoming and prom.

If student achievement is so important, I want to know why some of our most motivated high school students are being forced to spend time in classes they don’t need, particularly if they’ve met all the requirements the state has asked them to complete. If they want to go to college early or get on with their careers, we should not only allow them to do so, we should encourage them to do so.

In addition to getting some of our best and brightest out the door, there is another, more politically beneficial reason for introducing the EGAA: budget savings. The state of Minnesota is projected to run a $6.4 billion deficit for the 2010-11 biennium. Because we have a balanced-budget amendment written into our constitution, the state legislature and the governor need to come up with some kind of solution by our mandated adjournment date of May 18.

Balancing a deficit of that size will, of course, be a Herculean task. I believe it is incumbent upon every legislator to find someplace where budget savings can be found. So here’s how my plan saves taxpayer dollars.

Major Savings

Roughly speaking, the state of Minnesota annually spends $9,500 per student. My conservative estimate is that about $2,000 of that amount can be subtracted to account for aid to students with disabilities. That leaves an average annual expenditure of $7,500 per student. If the average scholarship awarded totals $5,000, that will produce a savings of $2,500 per student—money that can be booked as savings for the state’s General Fund or used for other education programs.

Multiply that amount by the estimated number of students who would be eligible under the EGAA, and $25 million of cost savings is instantly realized. And as the cost of a college education continues to rise and students see their friends taking advantage of this “free money,” there’s no reason to believe the savings to the state wouldn’t increase over time.

Now more than ever, America needs an education system that produces young people who are ready to compete with the best the rest of the world has to offer. Complacency and reliance on a system that may have served us well during the twentieth century will not help us compete in the twenty-first.

Whatever we policymakers and elected officials can do to encourage and motivate our students to get ahead is a responsibility we must take seriously.

For my part, I think early graduation scholarships and the opportunity they afford students is an innovative and reform-minded idea when we need one most.

“Whatever we policymakers and elected officials can do to encourage and motivate our students to get ahead is a responsibility we must take seriously.”

“[T]he first time I asked a group of high school students if any of them would be interested in graduating early, I knew I was onto something.”
The Heartland Institute is a 25-year-old national think tank dedicated to discovering, developing, and promoting free-market solutions to social and economic problems. In addition to *School Reform News*, Heartland publishes four other monthly policy publications: *Budget & Tax News*, *Health Care News*, *InfoTech & Telecom News*, and *Environment & Climate News*. These monthly newspapers serve as national outreach tools for the free-market movement. Heartland’s government relations department is in constant contact with thousands of state and federal elected officials on the top policy issues of the day. That is coupled with an active in-house public relations department that authors daily articles, press releases, letters to the editor, and op-eds. Finally, Heartland is home to *PolicyBot*, an online database of tens of thousands of free-market articles and research on a wide variety of policy issues.

Our combined publishing, government relations, and public relations efforts make us the premier free-market source for legislators, thought and opinion leaders, and concerned citizens.

---

**Where should America’s schools be headed?**

**Get on the Bus**

**With Heartland!**

---

**Yes! I want to become a Heartland Institute member.**

- My check in the amount of $______ is enclosed.
- Charge $______ to my  
  - Visa  
  - MC  
  - Am Ex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership Level</th>
<th>Benefit Level</th>
<th>Donor $100</th>
<th>Sustaining Donor $250</th>
<th>Patron $1,000</th>
<th>Benefactor $2,500</th>
<th>President’s Council $5,000</th>
<th>Silver/Gold/Platinum $10,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$100 Donor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$250 Sustaining Donor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1,000 Patron</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$2,500 Benefactor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$5,000 President’s Council</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000 Silver/Gold/Platinum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit Level</th>
<th>Donor $100</th>
<th>Sustaining Donor $250</th>
<th>Patron $1,000</th>
<th>Benefactor $2,500</th>
<th>President’s Council $5,000</th>
<th>Silver/Gold/Platinum $10,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Heartlander and choice of up to two Heartland newspapers</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free copies of Heartland Policy Studies</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20% off admission to Heartland events</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice of up to all five Heartland newspapers</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusive Conference Call Series</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusive Leaders of Liberty Events</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumers for Health Care Choices Roundtable Meeting</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIP receptions at Leaders of Liberty Events</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual President’s Council Retreat</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chairman’s VIP reception at President’s Council Retreat</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
<td>★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Heartland Institute is an independent nonprofit organization founded in 1984. Contributions are tax deductible under Section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code.

Please return this form to:
The Heartland Institute
19 South LaSalle St. #903
Chicago, Illinois 60603
fax 312•377•5000

The Heartlander and choice of up to two Heartland newspapers
Free copies of Heartland Policy Studies
20% off admission to Heartland events
Choice of up to all five Heartland newspapers
Exclusive Conference Call Series
Exclusive Leaders of Liberty Events
Consumers for Health Care Choices Roundtable Meeting
VIP receptions at Leaders of Liberty Events
Annual President’s Council Retreat
Chairman’s VIP reception at President’s Council Retreat

Please do not list my name as a sponsor in the Annual Report.
Please do not share my name with other organizations.

Please return card to The Heartland Institute, 19 South LaSalle Street #903, Chicago, Illinois 60603; 312•377•4000.
4 Ways To Save Billions While Improving Public Education

1. Pay high school students to graduate in 3 years.
2. Send a few children to private school to avoid costly new school additions.
3. Let home schooling families work together so that poor and single-parent families are not denied this option.
4. Use more online courses in high school.

To see the savings for your community, try the free and easy-to-use calculator at yankeeinstitute.org.